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ABSTRACT

This paper surveys the history and development of some of the major theories and concepts of leadership: (1) the trait approach--research focusing on personality characteristics presumed to set leaders apart from others; (2) leader behavior--what leaders actually do; and (3) situational variables--characteristics of the particular situation. Leadership research in the area of librarianship is then reviewed. Twenty-five references are listed. (MES)

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A REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

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A REVIEW OF LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

> Probably more has been written and less known about leadership than any other topic in the behavioral sciences.
>
> --Warren Bennis (1959)

INTRODUCTION

One message comes through loud and clear to anyone who performs even a cursory review of the literature of leadership research: Despite the large amount of research done, we still really know very little about leadership.

James MacGregor Burns, in his Nobel Prize-winning book, Leadership, published in 1978, described our lack of understanding in this way:

> We know far too little about leadership. We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age and hence we cannot agree even on the standards by which to measure, recruit, and reject it. Is leadership merely innovation--cultural or political? Is it essentially inspiration? Mobilization of followers? Goal setting? Goal fulfillment? Is the leader the definer of values? Satisfier of needs? If leaders require followers, who leads whom from where to where, and why? How do leaders lead followers without being wholly led by followers? Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.

This lack of understanding is also true in the field of librarianship. Andrea Dragon (1976) commented in her dissertation that "Leadership, although recognized by management theorists as an element in the management process, is generally neglected in the literature of library administration. Little is known about the leader behavior pattern of library administrators."

The reaction of the library profession has been, according to Joanne Euster, "some soul-searching, a wide variety of management workshops, courses and programs, a plethora of MLS/MBAs, and very little theory or research into what constitutes library leadership" (1984).

The need for librarians to understand the complex phenomenon of leadership is of pressing concern. Fundamental changes affecting the future of the profession are going to require strong leaders to help achieve its goals. To the extent that librarians can understand some of the variables of the leadership function, we can perform better when we are called upon to lead.

The real problem is that no single best model of leadership effectiveness has emerged from almost a century of research--we have not been able to come up with the "Theory of Leadership" or with a list of "Ten Laws of Leadership". The fact is that leadership is a very difficult concept to study and an integrated understanding of it still eludes us. The various theories that do exist merely provide frameworks for studying different aspects of the phenomenon. As such, however, they are still valuable.

An important first step in understanding the "language of leadership" is to understand the leadership research. This paper will survey the history and development of some of the major theories and concepts of leadership.

DEFINITION

One major obstacle is definitional. Stogdill (1981) presents eleven categories of definitions of leadership and Euster (1984) reduces them to five broad classes. For purposes of this discussion, I will define leadership in very general terms as "the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation" (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977).

TRAIT APPROACH

Discussions of leadership can be found in the writings of the ancient Chinese and Egyptians, but it was not until the early 1900s that scientific research into the topic began. The research at the beginning of this century first focused on the personality characteristics presumed to set leaders apart from others. This line of research was known as the Great Man Theory. Some of the characteristics which were identified and studied included physical factors (height, weight, age, appearance), fluency of speech, intelligence, self confidence, emotional control, social and economic status, popularity, and prestige. Although some correlations were shown between these traits and effectiveness, this line of research did not prove to be very fruitful because the relationships discovered (although statistically significant) were weak and of limited predictive value. In addition, longitudinal comparisons of effective and ineffective leaders in identical or similar

roles were not conducted. The methodology used instead was to compare the traits of leaders to the traits of followers. Finally, too many inconsistencies and contradictions appeared as researchers tried to develop a universal theory of leadership. Some of the same traits were found in both leaders and followers.

NEW CONCEPTS

As interest in the trait approach waned, research branched out to include the study of situational variables, leader behavior (as opposed to traits), organizational outcomes, and environmental variables which seemed to affect the organizational outcomes of leadership. A conceptual framework which shows the relationship among these variables can be described in the following way (Leadership in organizations, 1978). The interaction of certain personality attributes of the leader and characteristics of the particular situation, call them situational variables, result in leader behaviors which help determine organizational outcomes. In other words, situational variables and personal attributes of the leader relate to organizational outcomes only through the leader's behavior--what the leader does. To make the picture complete, of course, we would need to consider certain environmental variables such as economic conditions, laws, interest groups, and the like which also influence organizational outcomes. Consequently, researchers became interested in learning what specific things leaders do (that is, behaviors) to make them effective in organizations.

They wanted to know to what extent we can predict these behaviors by knowing something about leader attributes and the situations in which leaders find themselves.

LEADER BEHAVIOR

By the early 1950s, researchers had begun to become disenchanted with the trait approach and had begun to study leader behaviors. that is, what leaders actually do. A wide variety of activities in which leaders engaged were identified and researchers tried to group them together. Two similar results were developed independently at Ohio State University and the University of Michigan.

At Ohio State, two major dimensions were identified: consideration and initiating structure (Fleishman, 1973). Consideration referred to "the extent to which a leader exhibited concern for the welfare of the other members of the group"; initiation of structure referred to "the extent to which a leader initiated activity in the group, organized it, and defined the way the work was to be done" (Stogdill, 1981). To measure these two factors, the researchers developed the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) in which subordinates were asked to describe the behavior of their supervisors.

The results of the Ohio State studies were mixed. However, leaders were generally rated more effective when they scored high in both consideration and initiating structure. The greatest effectiveness was usually achieved

when a combination of both factors was present, the actual mix of the two being influenced by situational variables.

Blake and Mouton (1964) attempted to apply the results of the Ohio State research in the development of their prescriptive model called the Managerial Grid. They suggested that the single most effective leadership style would be a "team" approach (high consideration, high initiating structure). The least desirable leadership style would be characterized by low consideration and initiating structure.

The Managerial Grid made intuitive sense because it was simple and suggested the "best way" to lead. The problem is that no leader can realistically be expected to be both considerate and structure initiating in every task. The weakness of the Managerial Grid was that it did not consider the variables which could distinguish one situation from another.

At the University of Michigan, Rensis Likert (1961) also identified two dimensions in effective leader behavior which he distinguished as job-centered and employee-centered. His studies suggested that both sets of behavior improve performance, but that employee-centered behaviors led to better group morale.

In applying the results of his research, Likert postulated four systems of management: exploitive-authoritative, benevolent-authoritative, consultative, and participative-group. Although he found that most

organizations existed in an environment between benevolent-authoritative and consultative, he believed that the most effective leader behavior would be participative-group. By suggesting the best way to lead a group, this model (like the Managerial Grid) failed to account for the situational variables which must be considered in determining leadership effectiveness.

SITUATIONAL VARIABLES

By the 1970s, the important role played by situational variables in predicting organizational outcomes was realized and led to a situational approach in the study of research. A few of the most prominent approaches are described below.

One of the earliest discussions of the situational and contingent nature of leadership was led by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958, 1973) and has come to be referred to as the Leadership Continuum. In their view, leadership comprised seven styles ranging from highly boss-centered to highly subordinate-centered, depending on the amount of authority granted to the subordinates by the leader. The amount of authority granted depended on forces operating in the leader's personality, forces in the subordinates, and forces in the situation.

While not supported by research studies, this model was still important because it was an early attempt to conceptualize the idea that the appropriate leadership style depended on situational variable and personalities. The model suggested a variety of styles, not one best one. The

model was also used to describe the value of participation by subordinates in the decision-making process.

The Situational Leadership Theory, developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1977), considers the maturity of the group being led. It was originally called the Life Cycle Theory of Leadership and is based on the fact that people, in this case subordinates, change and mature as they gain knowledge and experience. According to the theory, the maturity of the group must be considered in deciding upon the appropriate leader behavior. In other words, leader behaviors must be geared toward the needs of the subordinates in a given situation. The behaviors prescribed by this theory are based on the consideration and initiation of structure dimensions of the Ohio State studies, but here the dimensions are called relationship and task behaviors, respectively.

Group maturity is introduced as the situational variable and is divided into two parts: job maturity (the group member's ability to do the job) and psychological maturity (the group member's willingness to do the job). Group maturity is measured by appropriate scales and subordinates are classified as either high or low in both job and psychological maturity. As a result, four levels of maturity are identified: low (low ability, low willingness), moderately low (low ability, high willingness), moderately high (high ability, low willingness), and high (high ability, high willingness).

As a result, Hersey and Blanchard developed a model which suggests that, as the group maturity changes, the leader should adjust the balance between task and relationship behaviors accordingly. A low maturity situation requires high task and low relationship behaviors, whereas the leader of a highly mature group can delegate more and be less engaged in either task or relationship activities.

The Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory developed by Gordon Graen and his associates (1975) concentrates on the formation of relationships between leaders and individual subordinates. This theory holds that effective leader behaviors directed toward individual subordinates depend upon the relationship established between the leader and each subordinate.

A vertical dyad is a superior/subordinate pairing. Each dyad can fall into one of three categories: an in-group, an out-group, and a middle group. The nature of the dyad coupled with the leader behavior exhibited create three patterns of exchange called "linkages". An in-group relationship is usually an open, high quality one. The dyad linkage involves leadership on the part of the superior, characterized by two-way communication, shared decision making, mutual support and trust, and freedom. The second type of linkage, found in low quality, out-group relationships, is characterized by supervision rather than leadership. The relationship is more formal with essentially downward communication. The leader engages in more task-oriented, structuring behaviors. The subordinate accepts

legitimate authority in exchange for pay and benefits. The middle group linkage is characterized as stewardship in a basically noncommittal relationship. Two-way communication most often resembles negotiation and the leader engages in task-oriented behaviors.

The theory predicts that where the vertical dyad linkage is of the in-group type job performance will be better, job satisfaction will be higher, and there will be fewer problems with supervision.

The Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness developed by Fred E. Fiedler (1978) proposes an interaction between leader style and the favorableness of the situation for the leader.

Fiedler contends that a group's effectiveness is contingent upon the appropriate match between leadership style and the degree to which the leader has control and influence over the situation. There are two basic leadership styles: task motivated and relationship motivated. A task-motivated leadership style meets the leader's need to gain satisfaction from performing the task; a relationship-motivated leadership style is oriented toward achieving good interpersonal relations within the work group and satisfies the leader's need to gain a position of prominence.

Situational control is the moderating variable in the relationship between leadership style and effective performance. It refers to the degree to which the dimensions of the group situation give the leader power and influence

over the group. Fiedler's Model considers three situational dimensions confronting the leader. In order of importance, they are leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. The particular mix of these three variables determines situational control.

These variables are dichotomized to provide eight categories of situations ranging from highly favorable to highly unfavorable for the leader. Task-motivated leaders perform best in situations which are highly favorable or in those which are highly unfavorable. Relationship-oriented leaders tend to perform best in situations which have moderate favorableness.

The Path-Goal Theory developed by House (1971) suggests means by which the leader can identify paths to convergent organizational and individual goals. It assumes that an individual can adopt different behavior patterns depending on the needs of the situation at any point in time. It is based on an assumption commonly found in leadership research: "that leader behavior affects organizational outcomes only to the extent that this behavior influences subordinates to do something in support of organizational goals" (Leadership in organizations, 1985). The leader then is forced to consider the characteristics of the subordinate as situational variables and tries to add to or subtract from the existing potential of the subordinates.

Subordinate characteristics are divided into two categories: those which relate to the subordinates themselves

(their needs, abilities, locus of control) and those which relate to the work environment (nature of the task, group norms and maturity, nature of the formal authority system).

Leader behaviors, in turn, are divided into four types derived from the consideration and initiating structure categories: instrumental, participative, supportive, and achievement-oriented. As suggested above, the leader must decide which behavior is appropriate given the nature of the situation, that is, the characteristics of the subordinates. The correct match will result in subordinate satisfaction, improved performance, increased effort, and higher motivation.

LIBRARY LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

As suggested at the beginning of this presentation, there has not been a lot of leadership research done in the area of librarianship. A review of Comprehensive Dissertation Abstracts revealed a few dissertations.

Several researchers used the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire to determine and examine perceptions and expectations of leadership behavior. Binder (1973) tested the applicability of organizational situational theory to the supervision of technical services, specifically cataloging and processing, in large academic libraries. He found that little if any relationship existed between three situational factors (the kind of work supervised, the educational level of the work group supervised, and the supervisory level) and the supervisory behavior of cataloging

and processing personnel as measured through their self-perceptions and self-expectations.

Comes (1978) investigated the influence of academic library directors on goal setting and goal achievement. He found no correlation to exist between the middle management perception of leader behavior of the directors and the existence of selected goals as perceived by middle management supervisors or between the middle management perceptions of leader behavior of the directors and the level of goal achievement as perceived by middle management supervisors. A significant difference was found between middle management's perceptions of the director's leader behavior and the director's self perceptions of leader behavior.

Dragon (1976), Rike (1976), and Sparks (1976) investigated and described the discrepancy between leader behavior descriptions made by library administrators and their subordinates. Dragon found that a discrepancy existed between library administrators' self-description of their behavior and that behavior as described by their subordinate group. Rike determined that the agreement on expectations for the staff leadership role of directors of state library agencies is greater than the agreement on perceptions of the behavior of the directors. Sparks, examining the library of one state university, showed a close correlation between leader and subordinate perception of the leader with respect to initiating structure but not with respect to consideration.

Boyd (1979) assessed the relationship between the organizational characteristics of complexity, centralization, formalization and stratification, two styles of leadership, and the rate of change in public libraries. With respect to leadership, he found (among other things) little perceived relationship between leadership style and rate of change; the more formalized the library, the more likely its leadership style will be structurally oriented; and libraries that have a high degree of authority are more structurally oriented.

Cortez (1980) examined the effects of library directors' theories of management upon middle managers' managerial behavior and middle managers' job satisfaction in medium-sized public libraries. His investigation showed that no direct and significant relationship existed between directors' management theories and middle managers' behavior or job satisfaction.

Mitchell (1987) tested the validity of Fiedler's Contingency Model for predicting the effectiveness of academic library department heads. While his results showed that different types of situational control do exist in academic library departments, little other support was found for the Model. There was no relationship between leader motivation and leadership effectiveness under different conditions of situational control, that is, task-motivated leaders were no more or less effective than relationship-motivated leaders in highly favorable situations. Task

structure and position power were found to account for the most variance in effectiveness.

SUMMARY

This review of the major approaches to the study of leadership and their extensions into librarianship reveals that there is still no generally accepted approach to the phenomenon. As theories and models are developed, they merely add new dimensions to be studied. But research must and does continue.

The main purpose and value in providing this review is to provide library leaders, both actual and potential, with a basic theoretical understanding so that they might develop the skills required to understand and deal with the many factors involved in the leadership process.

Stogdill (1981) has suggested that as we look at the future of leadership research, we must keep in mind that research will reflect society. As we shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, effective human relationships and personnel skills will become even more important. This will be true in librarianship as well. Riggs (1981) warned that societal changes affecting libraries (such as the inflationary erosion of book budgets, shrinkage of staff size, and the abbreviation of services) will require more effective leadership. "Leaders, not managers, will advance our libraries through the 80's and 90's into the year 2000." It is hoped that this review will help in a small way to prepare us for the assumption of this leadership role.

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